



# News Release

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## Behavioral health coping strategies focus on resilience this holiday season

**OLYMPIA** – The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) recognizes this holiday season may bring with it some unique emotional challenges. While some may be celebrating renewed opportunities for reconnecting, others may still be grieving the loss of friends or family. All of this may also be compounded by the emotions surrounding the state’s collective pandemic recovery. Behavioral health experts recognize the need for emotional support, coping strategies, [behavioral health resources](#), as well as collective resilience.

Knowing that, these coping strategies may be helpful for some during the holiday season this year:

1. **Listen to your body and recognize when you need rest.** Taking care of your own needs will leave you more capable of caring and having empathy for others.
2. **Practice active listening.** When having conversations with loved ones, make your goal to understand their point of view and make them feel heard and understood.
3. **Set boundaries.** Prioritize the gatherings you want to attend based on your comfort level and the known risk of each situation. It is okay to say no or to clarify you can only attend if certain safety measures are in place.
4. **Regulate your reactions.** Pay attention to what you’re feeling and think before responding. This has been a hard year for everyone and we are all approaching things from a different point of view.
5. **Don’t be afraid to ask for help** or to offer it to someone who needs it. Approaching the holidays with a healthy mindset will make time with family and friends safer and more enjoyable.

Physical and mental exhaustion are normal when dealing with the phases of disaster recovery, and it can be challenging for anyone to manage mixed emotions around the holidays. DOH recognizes that this year could bring some new difficulty, especially for those coping with the loss of a friend or family member.

“No matter how you’ve experienced the pandemic – if you’ve been a stay at home parent, an essential worker at a grocery store, a healthcare worker, or a teacher – the pandemic has been difficult for every single one of us, and we’ve all experienced a sense of loss in some ways,” says Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health. “But for some, these losses are acute for people grieving the loss of a loved one. They may find this season brings a new set of challenges that could be difficult to navigate.”

It is more important now than ever to not just focus on the difficulties the pandemic has caused, but the opportunities and challenges we all have overcome.

“If you feel overwhelmed, or like this year is harder than last year, that is normal. It’s okay to take a break from whatever is causing you stress.” said Dr. Kira Mauseth, co-lead for the DOH Behavioral Health Strike Team. “However, as the calendar turns over to a new year, it may be helpful to recognize and celebrate the remarkable efforts made by so many. The holiday season provides us a chance to express gratitude, care, and compassion to ourselves and to others. And to, hopefully, take a much-needed break when we can to reflect with hope on our collective resilience, and all that we are capable of together.”

[Visit our behavioral health resources page](#) for crisis support numbers, tips on self-care, and additional resources for mental and emotional well-being. [Visit our safe gatherings](#) page for tips and ideas to gather safely during the holidays. If you need someone to talk with about what you’re going through, call the [WA Listens support line](#) at 1-833-681-0211.

The [DOH website](#) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. [Find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#). Sign up for the DOH blog, [Public Health Connection](#).